United Nations DP/2010/22

Executive Board of the United Nations Development Programme and of the United Nations Population Fund

Distr.: General
24 March 2010

Original: English

Annual session 2010
21 June to 2 July 2010, Geneva
Item 4 of the provisional agenda
Evaluation

Evaluation of the regional programme for the Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States, 2006-2010

Contents

		Page
I.	Introduction	2
II.	Main findings	2
III.	Conclusions	7
IV.	Recommendations	9

10-28936 (E) 230410

I. Introduction

1. The present report provides a summary of the findings of the evaluation of the regional programme for Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States, 2006-2010. The evaluation was carried out between July and December 2009.

2. The evaluation was designed to assess the overall programme performance and outcomes of the regional programme in Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States, as well as to evaluate contributions of UNDP through the regional programme to development results in the region. In assessing the contribution of the programme, the evaluation covered the following areas: (a) Relevance: How relevant is the regional programme to regional priority development needs and UNDP corporate strategies? (b) Responsiveness: How has the regional programme responded to the changing context within which it works? (c) Partnerships: How has the regional programme used partnership to increase the effectiveness of its support? (d) Effectiveness: How effective has the regional programme been in achieving its objectives? (e) Efficiency: Has it used its financial, human and other resources efficiently? (f) Sustainability: Are the results to which the regional programme contributes sustainable?

3. The evaluation findings and recommendations are intended to contribute to the formulation of the next regional programme and its alignment with the UNDP strategic plan, 2008-2013. The methodology included a comprehensive desk review and analysis of outcome and programme/project evaluations, monitoring reports, and other self-assessment reports. This was supplemented with five detailed country studies undertaken by members of the core evaluation team. Each was a detailed examination of the role and effectiveness of the regional programme in the country and covered the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Ukraine, Moldova, Armenia and Kazakhstan. While country studies do present a problem of generalization, they can be used to identify and highlight issues that can be further investigated across the programme. In addition, national consultants conducted six brief country studies (Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) and international consultants based in Moscow conducted one brief country study (Russian Federation).

II. Main findings

Regional programme

4. The Regional Bureau for Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (RBEC) regional programme document states that the overall goal of the programme is to help Governments, civil society and the private sector fulfil the Millennium Development Goals. To do so the programme has to focus on meeting three key challenges: (a) poverty reduction and economic development; (b) democratic governance; and (c) sustainable energy and environmental practices. In addressing each of these challenges, the programme makes linkages to gender, HIV/AIDS, conflict prevention and recovery, and human security (including trafficking in human beings, narcotics and weapons).

5. According to the regional programme document, regional programming has to be implemented at the regional, subregional, national and subnational levels to reflect the needs of country offices and external partners. Subregional programming has to expand further, focusing on development challenges and opportunities in Central Asia, groupings of Commonwealth of Independent States; the Western Balkans; countries seeking to join the European Union; and new European Union member countries. One of the key functions of

regional programming is to consolidate nascent communities of practice and continue to identify, codify, and disseminate best practices and development successes across the region and globally. Regional programming also has to reinforce and strengthen UNDP national programming by identifying and disseminating best practices and development successes.

6. The quality of the description of the results framework in the regional programme document is, however, low. It has logical gaps and many results indicators are poorly designed; the regional programme outcomes were revised several times and changed dramatically. Moreover, management and staff of UNDP country offices are not fully aware of the regional programme concept. Their perceptions of the regional programme are contradictory, which reflects lack of consistency in how the programme is described and presented by various parties and in various documents. There is a systemic cause for the above-mentioned contradictions and flaws in the regional programme framework: the UNDP regional programme is different from a country programme, not simply the equivalent to a country programme at the regional level

7. The regional programme is managed by RBEC Bratislava Regional Centre (BRC), which also manages the UNDP global programme interventions at the regional level. Although there are different interpretations of the programme, the de facto UNDP regional "programme" includes: (a) advisory and training services provided to the country offices; (b) design and implementation of "regional" projects; (c) knowledge services and facilitation of the exchange of knowledge through knowledge networks (communities of practice); and (d) UNDP positioning/marketing/networking in the region.

Advisory services

8. Overall the consulting component of the regional programme responds to country office requests very well. In fact any consultation should meet some specific client's need by default: this is the nature of the consulting business. Thus, when the context changes, clients' needs also change and the BRC responds to the changing context by meeting the changing needs of its clients and partners. Remote consultations – via e-mail and phone - provided by the BRC proved very effective. Many respondents in different countries reported on the timely and high-quality advice they had received from the centre in that way. Advanced information technology will help the BRC become even more responsive to clients requests and to the changing context.

9. While working hard on providing high-quality consulting services to its clients, the BRC is facing at least three major challenges. First, the uneven distribution of work between the consultants and the work overload of the lead consultants needs to be overcome. Distribution of work between consultants is uneven because the best BRC specialists are so popular that sometimes country offices and national partners have to wait for months to get the expert they want. Hence, a timely BRC/regional programme response to requests for specific experts sometimes is impossible. Some of the consequences of such popularity are extremely intense travel schedules and incredible workloads of the lead BRC experts. Secondly, staff turnover in the BRC is high and affects BRC performance. There is no one simple explanation for the high level of staff turnover but all respondents interviewed by the evaluation team agreed that BRC consultants work very hard and under serious pressure. Thirdly, although specialists hired by the BRC in all cases have solid professional backgrounds in their respective areas, not all of them have experience in providing consulting services and the proper skills specific to consulting services. As a result, in some cases - according to our respondents in the country offices – BRC consulting missions turn out not to be overly effective owing to the ineffective client-consultant interactions rather than the lack of consultants' expertise.

Regional projects

10. At the time this evaluation was conducted, the RBEC portfolio included 189 regional projects implemented since 2004. Approximately 37 per cent of regional projects are implemented in the area of energy and environment, which is more than one and a half times as many projects related to poverty reduction and over twice as many than those implemented in the democratic governance area. This shift could be explained by the availability of funds for energy and environment projects, requests from the country offices and effective work of the energy and environment practice.

11. Project ideas either result from internal regional discussions or are the regional part of large global programmes, such as the Environment and Security Initiative, the Global Compact, and Growing Sustainable Business for Poverty Reduction. The BRC facilitates the project design process, and country offices are in many (but not all) cases consulted with or actively involved in the project design. BRC staff manages regional projects implemented under the regional programme. In most other cases, the Team Leaders of BRC practices are not heavily involved in managing regional projects and are more focused on subject matters as well as on providing and supervising BRC services in their respective areas.

12. Making an assessment of the regional programme's contribution to results across a wide range of countries is extremely difficult without outcome evaluations and/or a critical mass of project evaluations. Nonetheless, based on desk reviews and fieldwork, the evaluation team has made the assessments described in the paragraphs below.

13. *Poverty and economic development.* The major contributions to sustainable development results in the areas of poverty and economic development were made through development and dissemination of knowledge products, capacity-building, and consultations. In many countries, the regional programme resulted in new policies, strategies and measurement systems implemented at the national level. The BRC poverty practice enhanced its capacity in the course of regional programme implementation and became a strong asset. UNDP flagship knowledge products, such as the regional and sub-regional Human Development Reports are a unique contribution that could hardly be made by any other agency. The creation of Web-based information sources could be considered a potentially sustainable result as well, but only on the stipulation that those recourses are maintained and updated on a regular basis by the BRC and/or its partners. Global Compact projects in the countries visited by the evaluation team did not include exit strategies for UNDP and are coming to a close, while the results achieved are unlikely to be sustained.

14. *Sustainable energy and the environment.* The key contributions of the regional programme to the development results in the area of sustainable energy and environment were made through research, development of subject-specific methods and tools, training and consultations, and dissemination of knowledge products that included Web-based resources. One of the regional projects implemented by this practice had an explicit goal of assisting country offices and UNDP partners in resource mobilization, which was greatly appreciated by the beneficiaries in the Central Asian countries. Several regional projects coordinated by this practice were truly "regional"—aimed at all the countries and provided results that could benefit all the countries. Energy and environment differs from other practices and could be explained by the nature of this subject area: many environmental issues affect all the countries regardless of the economic development and political context. In this respect, energy and environment practice has very good potential to grow and enhance its contribution to development results in the future.

15. *Democratic governance*. The key contributions to development results were made by this practice though research, development and dissemination of knowledge products, capacity development, and policy advice. Democratic governance places a special emphasis on networking. As compared to the other practice areas, the regional programme made a unique, sustainable and very important contribution to development results by establishing and enhancing a Regional Centre for Public Administration Reform to support regional cooperation. Since the contribution in the area of democratic governance depends, to a great extent, on the political context and the level of economic development of the countries involved, this practice had to be very sensitive and flexible to adjust to the variety of circumstances in different countries. Respondents in all the countries spoke highly of the potential of the current democratic governance practice. The demand for high-quality policy advice in this practice area is vast and growing. The key challenge for the regional programme will be to provide a proper level of high-quality supply. The potential of professional networks established by this practice will help the process.

16. *Crisis prevention and recovery*. The major contribution to the development results of the regional programme was made through technical assistance, but not through the regional projects. The practice team includes only three people[1] in Bratislava, hence its ability to send consultants to the RBEC countries is limited. Hiring a new consultant who will be located in Central Asia seems a good decision as that region is known for its high risk of natural disasters. It will be useful to assess the effectiveness of this approach in a few months' time when there will be enough evidence to reflect on and lessons learned to share with other practices. Meanwhile the major challenge for the newly hired consultant is coordination.

17. *HIV/AIDS*. The regional project on HIV/AIDS launched a new partnership strategy in 2007 that has already demonstrated a significant increase in delivery via strategic partnerships, both within and outside the United Nations system. That was an obvious success. The RBEC regional team has been selected to be the first UNDP regional team to co-locate with the respective UNAIDS Regional Support Team as part of a global UNDP/UNAIDS agreement. Enhanced partnerships with the United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the Turkish International Cooperation and Development Agency, the Czech Trust Fund, and others, are being pursued. On the other hand, there is no general consensus among UNDP core staff in the region on whether or not UNDP should have an HIV/AIDS component of its regional programme since the regional support role to country offices could be played by UNAIDS.

18. *Gender equality*. The major contributions made by this practice were knowledge products— reports and publications on gender issues as well as workshops on those issues. Online resources created and maintained by this practice are valued by country offices and UNDP partners. The community of practice facilitated by the BRC Gender Team is one of the most active. The gender-mainstreaming strategy is fully in line with United Nations and UNDP priorities.

Knowledge management

19. *Knowledge management*. Knowledge management -- the provision of knowledge services and facilitation of the exchange of knowledge through knowledge networks --is one the key components of the regional programme and one of the core functions of the BRC. The objective of the knowledge management efforts in Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States is to support the achievement of the UNDP development agenda in the region. Knowledge management does this by enabling UNDP

[1] Prior to 2009 the team included only one person.

to work in a more networked and collaborative fashion, where people's knowledge and practical experiences are leveraged to the fullest extent, with the lowest transaction costs, and as easily as possible. This is achieved by building on existing experience across UNDP in the region, and the success of communities of practices, utilizing existing networks of professionals, codifying UNDP strengths and weaknesses, and by developing new tools and methods to support knowledge management.

20. Over the past several years, the BRC has made significant progress to integrate key knowledge management activities into everyday practice work and to ensure that knowledge management is everyone's business. The role of the Knowledge Management Unit at the BRC is to ensure that these elements are constantly present and strengthened throughout the practices, offer support and capacity-building for the communities of practice, and to promote cross-practice fertilization.

21. Government officials who were involved in regional networking activities find them very useful. Benefits are twofold: they can learn about the experience of others and compare their own experience and level of development against others. Personal meetings enable people to learn the practical and detailed experience of others, to find out how things work in reality. Facilitation of partnership development for the country offices is one of the functions effectively implemented by the BRC that is very well positioned to do that. Fieldwork undertaken by the evaluation team revealed that these knowledge management activities are much appreciated by country offices.

Strategic positioning

22. RBEC describes the BRC as a purely internal UNDP RBEC consulting unit focused on helping country offices, which is "also managing regional projects". The regional programme (defined broadly) is automatically aligned with country programming, and sub-regional/cross-country programming through consulting and knowledge services that are provided to meet the programming needs of the country offices. With regard to the sub-regional or regional projects initiated and managed by the BRC, the situation becomes more complicated. Several respondents reported that some regional projects were designed without proper consultation with country offices. Respondents said that those projects could have been more relevant to their respective countries if the country offices had participated in the project design more actively. On the BRC side, such situations could be easily explained by time pressure natural for the "sales" process rather than by a lack of desire to have country offices on board.

23. Actual development occurs at the country level, and UNDP country offices will always stay at the heart of UNDP activities. Thus, the regional programme helps country offices and their national partners develop their capacity, design and implement their plans and measure the development results. The major strength of the regional programme and its essence are in helping others by mentoring, coaching, consulting, teaching, informing, and facilitating. The majority of respondents in the region, including UNDP staff and representatives of UNDP partner organizations, confirmed the relevance of such an approach.

24. Through its consulting, training and knowledge services the regional programme contributes to achieving the UNDP goal of becoming a "go to" agency in the areas of UNDP specialization. Promotion of UNDP knowledge products and networking at the regional level also contribute to this result. Design and implementation of regional projects and facilitation of exchange of knowledge through knowledge networks contribute to the development of inter-country cooperation as well as to scaling up successful development programmes. According to the majority of respondents, the unique contribution of the

regional programme to the projects implemented by three or more countries lies in developing project ideas, facilitation of project design and fundraising, but not in the project management.

25. The regional programme demonstrated good responsiveness to emerging situations. For example, the RBEC response to an emergency situation relates to the winter of 2008 when Tajikistan experienced a severe energy crisis. In response to the global economic crisis, the RBEC implemented a number of activities that included conferences, workshops, region-specific publications and expert presentations.

26. UNDP has successfully developed good partnerships with the European Union, especially important since more than half the countries of Central and Eastern Europe have acceded to, or are seeking to join, the European Union. The regional programme has developed important partnerships with the private sector, for example with Coca Cola, aimed at improving access to safe drinking water and other water projects in the region. It has also supported South-South partnerships and knowledge sharing proved effective. For example, Armenia's experience with the regional programme has been appreciated by Tajikistan and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and disseminated with the help of Armenian consultants. UNDP RBEC also partners with a number of United Nations organizations in the region, such as the United Nations Industrial Development Organization, the United Nations Environment Programme, UNECE, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Economic Commission for Europe, the United Nations Office for Project Services, the United Nations Development Fund for Women, the United Nations Population Fund, UNAIDS, and the International Labour Organization.

III. Conclusions

27. **Conclusion 1: The RBEC regional programme in general, and the RBEC in particular, are extremely important for fulfilling the RBEC mission in the region.** Having a regional centre (RBEC) that is closer to the beneficiaries (mostly country offices) than the RBEC office in New York strengthens the RBEC presence in the region. It has performed well across its main areas on intervention, consulting, projects, and knowledge management. The regional programme is in line with the UNDP corporate strategy and corporate goals in the region. It is also at the forefront of implementing the UNDP regionalization policy.

28. **Conclusion 2: The combination of projects, activities and services implemented by the regional programme is beyond what is traditionally called a "programme".** A regional programme is different from a country programme and could not be considered equivalent to a country programme at the regional level since the UNDP "region" simply does not have some of the essential characteristics specific to a country. Thus, a framework developed for country-level programming cannot be used for regional programming without serious revisions, and the regional programme cannot be put in a country programme framework.

29. **Conclusion 3: The regional programme has a wide variety of types of project from regional/subregional interventions to umbrella initiatives with nationally implemented components. It is difficult to say which type has the greatest value added or what the appropriate mix should be. Rather the regional programme should remain opportunistic and flexible.** The regional projects made substantial contributions to the development results in the region, especially in the areas of poverty reduction and

economic development, sustainable energy and environment and democratic governance. The "regional projects" most often cover only a few countries that face common issues. The region is so big and diverse that one can hardly develop a project relevant to all countries. Country offices find most effective those multi-country and regional projects that are developed with their participation. Participation of the country offices in the project design increases not only ownership but also project relevance. Projects aimed at creation of knowledge products and development of knowledge management and dissemination potentially can be beneficial for the entire region and can use UNDP regional capacity. Thus, such projects can become truly regional as opposed to the projects involving a few countries. Advisory and knowledge services by nature are highly relevant to any country and subregion.

31. **Conclusion 8: The BRC is at the heart of the regional programme. The BRC has a strong capacity and in-depth expertise in most UNDP priority areas. The BRC is a unique source of knowledge and advice for the country offices.** The regional programme is aligned with country programmes. The BRC is responsive to country office requests and works hard to provide the best possible services in a timely manner. The BRC was responsive to the economic crisis and implemented a number of activities to help country offices cope with the crisis. It is very well positioned to generate and further develop ideas for new projects that can be implemented at the country level or by two or more country offices. Expertise, access to information and connections with the donor community create unique advantages for the BRC as a "project design bureau". As a well-established professional "organized" organization, it plays an important role in positioning UNDP in the region. Although the way it is presented in the internal environment (a "link" between headquarters and the country offices, internal consulting unit) does not adequately reflect the nature of its services and its contribution to the development results.

32. BRC activities not only cover a broad range of subject areas, but are diverse by nature: project management business is different from consulting advisory/knowledge management business. High-quality consulting services and project management activities require different organizational capacities and different competencies of people involved. Thus, the BRC has at least two very different modes of operation: a project management mode and a consulting mode. It is important to consider that high-quality timely advisory services provided by the BRC, according to information gathered in the evaluation, are more needed and valued by the country offices than direct project execution. The BRC geographic location is convenient for the region. The BRC has little time difference with country offices. Travelling from Bratislava or Vienna is indeed more efficient for organization and easier for consultants than travelling overseas.

33. **Conclusion 9: Although the BRC is staffed by high-quality professionals and can provide good consulting services, there is room for improvement.** Consulting services will remain an essential part of BRC business but to provide high-quality performance, BRC staff will need to have not only in-depth subject knowledge and skills in their respective areas, but also excellent communication skills and advanced consulting skills. The BRC staff workload is extremely heavy. This is particularly true of the lead BRC consultants – the core BRC "asset". Their travel schedules are overwhelming, and each assignment involves very intense work and a high level of responsibility. It is stressful and there is a high risk of staff burnout. In such circumstances, high staff turnover inside the BRC is expected. BRC interventions provide most sustainable results when they include capacity development components. The only problem with that is staff turnover in the country offices and in the partner organizations: when people leave, organizations lose capacity and sustainability of the results achieved are then at risk.

[illegible] Recommendations

[illegible] **Recommendation 1. Develop and implement a more relevant approach to programming at the regional level that recognizes the distinctiveness of regional programming within UNDP.** FHRC should consider the distinctive nature of regional programming and develop corresponding guidelines based on the existing UNDP documents and FHRC HRC experience in the region. The new approach might be radical. While results-based policy and strategy remain relevant for FHRC HRC activities at the regional level, FHRC may not necessarily use the traditional programme framework similar to the country one to describe the regional programme.

[illegible] The regional FHRC strategy based on the United Nations policies and UNDP policies and strategies sets priorities for all the countries in the region. Countries should develop programmes in accordance with the existing rules and regulations. Projects as well as activities could be designed and implemented at the regional, subregional, multi-country and country levels. This approach keeps the focus on the country programmes. It allows enough flexibility to include any projects and activities implemented in the region at various levels. HRC consulting, knowledge management and marketing activities can be included as well.

[illegible] **Recommendation 2. Focus on the development of "cross-sectoral" regional projects with an emphasis on the subregional level and ensure active participation of the respective country offices in the design of the interventions.** Regional projects should be developed predominantly at the subregional level and/or should be cross-sectoral. Geographic focus of the regional projects might be substituted or supplemented with problem focus and therefore FHRC "regional" projects may even involve countries from outside the region, such as the Islamic Republic of Iran or China. Cross-sectoral projects could involve countries that face or are affected by similar problems. Subregional programming is more natural in that respect and is supported by all country offices. In any case, it is crucial to get country offices involved in the project design at the very early stages so that the project can be more relevant to each of the countries involved and consider their similarities and differences.

[illegible] **Recommendation 3. Keep knowledge products and knowledge management services as a top priority of the regional programme and ensure adequate investment in this area.** Knowledge products and services that include development and facilitation of communities of practice proved to be relevant to the entire region and much appreciated by the country offices and UNDP partners in the FHRC region. Existing efforts to integrate knowledge management into all activities within the regional programme need to be continued and existing products simplified.

[illegible] **Recommendation 4. Reconsider the strategic position of the regional programme and its contribution to development results through high-quality development services to Governments and other UNDP partners in cooperation with the country offices, rather than as a "link" between the headquarters and country offices or an internal consulting unit focused primarily on supporting country offices and managing projects.** In its regard to strategic positioning of the HRC and the regional programme, it may be better to put an emphasis on contributing to the development results through providing high-quality technical assistance to UNDP partners in the region in cooperation with country offices. In that case, the HRC will not appear to be just an internal "link" or internal unit supporting country offices. It will look like an active partner

[illegible] a regional development, which better reflects what it really is about. It will also help to harmonize what the [illegible] does with organizations of potential donors.

36. The [illegible] needs to make a clear distinction between the project management and consulting modes of operations. The [illegible] may consider focusing exclusively on the consulting and knowledge management activities. That was recommended by most respondents from the country offices. If the [illegible] decides to keep both modes, it should review its organizational structure and systems to separate project management business lines consulting. To be effective either as project managers or as consultants, the same people should not combine the two roles. Ideally, the regional project manager should be based closer to the place where the project is implemented.

39. **Recommendation 9. Strengthen investment in the professional development of staff, specifically in the skills related to consulting activities, and carefully plan staff workload.** The [illegible] needs to build capacity of its consultants. The programme of [illegible] staff professional development should include consulting skills and customer service skills training. Training should be provided at various levels (beginner, intermediate, advanced). The [illegible] has to carefully plan its own staff workload taking into consideration their travel schedule. Maintaining travel and [illegible] and remote consultations should be mandatory. Staff rotation and cross turnover should be planned rather than assisted the [illegible] can approach one consultants for a certain period of time and then hire new people, who should be on the [illegible] list of candidates. Since the demand from the country offices and their partners for high-quality consulting services is seriously ahead of the existing supply, the [illegible] should develop and update regional rosters of consultants by practice areas. A network of pre-qualified consultants can help the [illegible] provide the proper level of supply.